

people of color, young people, urban people, and people who vote Democratic. It has nothing to do with fraud. They haven't pointed out that there is more fraud in those areas than in other areas. It is just blatant, blatant partisan advantage.

Whatever voting changes Republicans think are good for them, they will make them, even if it means resorting to the awful and un-American act of voter suppression. So in State after State—State after State—Republicans are reducing polling hours and locations and the number of drop boxes so that Americans of all parties, but particularly aimed at Democratic voters, people of color, young people, poor people, have a harder time finding the time, place, and manner to vote.

They are limiting the kind of IDs you can use, like student IDs, while at the same time removing requirements of any form of licensing to own a firearm. Has any study shown that there is less fraud among firearm owners than students? There is probably very little among either, but they pick one group and not the other, and we know why.

Republican legislatures are making it easier to own a gun than to vote. Republican legislatures are making it harder to vote early, harder to vote by mail, and harder to vote after work. They are making it a crime to give food or water to voters waiting in long lines. They are trying to make it harder for Black churchgoers to vote on Sunday. And they are actually making it easier for unelected judges and partisan election boards to overturn the results of an election, opening the door for some demagogue, a Trumpian-type demagogue—maybe he himself—to try and subvert our elections in the very same way that Trump tried to do it in 2020.

Republicans say these laws are about “election integrity.” They claim they are only trying to “secure the vote.” Some of my friends here in Washington have resorted to the old refrain that election laws are best left to the States, ignoring the fact that for generations, we, in Congress, have passed Federal election laws and constitutional amendments to prevent exactly this kind of discrimination and voter suppression.

We all know what these laws are about. I daresay my Republican colleagues know. They are not stupid. When the State of Texas proposes to limit voting hours on Sunday to only a few hours in the evening, do they really believe that is about preventing fraud? Do my Senate friends want to back up that kind of thing, prevent it from even being talked about here on the floor of the Senate? When Georgia Republicans say it is a crime to give a voter some water or food as they wait in line on a hot day, do they really think they are preventing voter fraud by denying them a snack? Give me a break. Give me a break.

Republicans across the country are deliberately targeting all the ways

that younger, poorer, non-White, and typically Democratic voters access the ballot. Republicans claim they are making it easier to vote and harder to cheat in an election. In reality, they are making it harder to vote and easier to cheat in an election, and we all know it.

And all we want to do here is debate it in regular order—regular order—which colleagues on both sides of the aisle have asked for. That is what we are asking for here, just to debate these things, and they won't even do that because they are so afraid of what that debate will show: that this is not election integrity; that this is voter suppression and voter suppression directed at only one group of voters.

Well, we are going to see what happens today. Later today, the entire country will see whether our Republican friends are willing to even debate this issue in broad daylight. This afternoon, the U.S. Senate will vote on a motion to proceed to voting rights legislation. We all know what a motion to proceed is around here, but let me explain it. All it says is let's go forward with debate. Let's debate something, and this is among the most important things we could ever debate, the right to vote—what our soldiers have died for and what peaceful marchers have been bloodied for, the right to vote.

It takes 60 votes to start that debate. Everyone knows you still need 60 votes to end the debate on a bill. So even if the Republicans don't like the legislation at the end of the process, let them vote against it then. But, no, they don't even want to debate it. They don't even want to debate it because they are afraid. They want to deny the right to vote, make it harder to vote for so many Americans, and then they don't want to talk about it, sweep it under the rug, and hope that Americans don't hear about it.

But Americans will hear about it. We are going to make sure of that, and millions in the country who are rightly and correctly outraged by what is happening will let everyone know what has happened.

Now, only by starting the process can Senators offer amendments, change the bill, forge compromise. Only then can Senators engage in a full-throated debate about what this Chamber should do about the assault on voting rights in this country. Obviously, there are arguments about what should be done to protect voting rights and safeguard our democracy. Obviously, there are arguments about which policies are the most effective. But shouldn't we at least agree to debate the issue?

That is the only question for the U.S. Senate today. Do my Republican colleagues believe that voting rights, the most fundamental in a democracy, the right that generations of Americans have marched for and protested to achieve, that generations of American soldiers have fought and died to secure, is that worthy of debate? Of course it is.

Should the U.S. Senate even debate how to protect the voting rights of our citizens? There is only one correct answer. We will see if our Republican colleagues choose it this afternoon.

This is not simply a partisan issue, as partisan as the Republican side and the State legislatures and now here in the Senate seem to make it. It is about the fundamental values in this country. It is about what we are all about.

When the Constitution was started in most States, you had to be a White male Protestant property owner to vote. There has been an inexorable march to expand that right to vote and allow more and more Americans to have that right to vote. This is a giant step backward. Obviously, it is a partisan issue to the Republicans, but it is a much deeper issue than that.

Will our colleagues stand up for what generations of Americans have fought for, marched for, and died for or will they just slink away and say we are not even going to debate this?

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

IRAN

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, over the weekend, Iran held what its Supreme Leader might call a Presidential election. To the rest of the world, including millions of Iranians, what actually happened was quite clear. The regime's favored choice was selected from a limited field of approved candidates in a carefully controlled bit of political theater. There is no doubt this charade works as intended. The Ayatollah got a President-elect with a record of strict adherence to his regime's revolutionary orthodoxy. Meanwhile, former Presidential candidates who emerged as leaders in the popular 2009 Green Movement remain under house arrest. Like his predecessors, Ebrahim Raisi will serve as a figurehead while the Supreme Leader and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard actually run the show.

But even rigged elections have consequences, and the new most visible figure in Tehran has a proven history as a headline theocrat. For decades, from his time on a so-called death committee in the 1980s, the President-elect played an intimate role in the trial, conviction, and summary execution of political prisoners and peaceful protesters. There is no question he is an extreme hardliner, even in the Iranian context, and now he is set to be the so-called counterpart to President Biden as this administration reengages eagerly with the world's most active state sponsor of terrorism.

In some circles, a looming turnover in the top ranks of Iranian leadership is being spun as a reason for the White House to rush even faster than it already is toward restoring the Obama administration's failed nuclear deal. One particularly eager assessment in the New York Times called the next 6